DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 258 916 SO 016 680

AUTHOR England, Kim
TITLE Conflict over Education in a Spatial Context: A Critical Review.
PUB DATE Apr 85
NOTE 11p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association of American Geographers (Detroit, MI, April 1985).
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Historical Materials (060)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Busing; *Conflict; Educational Change; Educational Finance; *Educational Policy; Equal Education; Literature Reviews; *Neighborhoods; *Public Education; Resource Allocation; School Desegregation; *Social Change

ABSTRACT

Public education has been and continues to be subject to a variety of conflicts, among them busing for racial balance and the search for an equitable process of financing education. This paper reviews some of the literature and documentation of educational conflicts. Two broad but not mutually exclusive categories of conflict are defined: (1) conflicts based on class struggle and (2) distributional conflicts. Prior to World War II the first type of struggle predominated; since then the second has been more important. Conflicts over the spatial reorganization of school districts, the construction of new schools, and tax increases are examples of distributional conflicts. A possible explanation for this historical change may be found in the changing relationship between people and their neighborhoods. Neighborhoods are increasingly seen as simply places to live rather than as the center of social relationships. They are shaped not by those relationships but by exclusionary zoning and financial institutions. Understanding these changes is crucial for understanding educational conflict. (IS)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☒ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Kim V.L. England

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

ED258916

CONFLICT OVER EDUCATION IN A SPATIAL CONTEXT: A CRITICAL REVIEW

by
Kim England
Ohio State University

April 1985

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

50 016 630

Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association of American Geographers (Detroit, MI, April 1985).

Conflict over Education in a Spatial Context: A Critical Review. by

Kim England, Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio 43210

Mass education has been and continues to be subject to a variety of conflicts. Two examples of recent vintage that come to mind are busing for racial balance and the search for an equitable process of financing education. In this paper some of the literature and documentation of conflicts centering around education will be reviewed. Two broad, but not muturally exclusive, categories of conflict are defined. Before the Second World War conflicts appear to have been based on class struggle. Since then conflicts seem to have been more distributional in nature.

The second part of this paper comprises an examination of the degree to which the spatial context of these conflicts has been important. It would appear that space seems to have become more important since the Second World War. The commodification of the neighborhood is offered as a possible explanation for this. Finally the reification of space that often accompanies this process of commodification is examined.

The changing form of education

Generally speaking nineteenth century education was characterised by major class struggles over the introduction of and length of mandatory schooling. The middle-class positively encouraged the institutionalisation of the education process. Such legislation however, found little favour among working-class parents. An examination of contemporary documentation provides a partial explanation as to why this was

so. The 1884 report of the Illinois Bureau of Labor Statistics, which was an investigation of the budgets of the state's working class families, provides an instance. According to these figures approximately fifty percent of the working class families living in Chicago were in debt. In cases where children worked they earned thirty-six percent of the total income of their families. Furthermore it was found that a staggering eighty percent of the families in the state relied upon the earnings of their children in order to survive. In short it was often economically necessaary for children to work.

Hogan (1978) examines these patterns and suggests that they be placed withih the setting in which working class families were embedded. He emphasises the vicissitudes of wage labour and the insecurity of a working class plagued by ill health and periodic unemployment. Child employment was an important strategy in the struggle for the families' economic survival. It is not suprising then, that working class parents opposed mandatory schooling and that truancy was rife among working class children.

The bourgoise response is well documented. Issel (1979), for example, quotes a contributor to the Pennsylvania School Journal of 1881 as declaring that:

> The increase of foreign immigration, the increase of the Negro population, and the disposition of parents in manufacturing cities to send their children to work rather than to school ... will eventually work great injury to the nation.

Indeed such retorts reflect, according to Katz (1977), a common concern among nineteenth century education reformers. There was a fear that the influx of predominantly rural immigrants in to the States was generating social disorder. Education, or more specifically, 'Americanisation', was regarded to be a panacea. Furthermore, as Katz has

pointed out, a captive audience could more easily be inculcated with the capitalist industrial norms pertaining to 'proper' behaviour. As such, the mechanisms that would lead to nation-wide compulsory education were set in motion.

The categorisation presented in this paper is not intended to be time specific. Reminants of class-struggle type conflicts over education are still in existance today. Sub-culture groups in schools could be seen as a residual of the nineteenth century resistance to formal education. Willis (1979) presents a picture of an antagonistic and subversive element in the school, the members of which view life in terms of 'us' and 'them'. He combines Marxist social theory with an ethnography of twelve 'anti-school kids' to illustrate "how working class kids get working class jobs". Through the adoption of a counter school sub-culture these pupils come to reject office work as effeminate and choose manual jobs as a more appropriate form of work.

The degree to which there is or was a struggle over the imposition of formal education can be expected to vary geographically. Such variations are dependienent upon local factors including the structure of the job market, the availability of jobs for children; and the role of the church - the Church of England, for example, played the role of a social integrator.

More often since the Second World War conflicts centering on education have tended to be more distributional in nature. Indeed it is fair to say that such conflicts have been instrumental in the development of many of the major education reforms over the last few decades. Yet at the same time the education system has been accused of multifaceted discrimination. The Coleman Report, which came at the height

of the Civil Rights movement, represents the most thorough study of educational inequality conducted in the United States. So in a country where equality of opportunity is held paramount it has become necessary to attempt to upgrade the educational achievements of these disadvantaged groups. Hence the introduction of programs such as Project Headstart and Follow Through.

Increasingly the existence of inequalities of opportunities and the necessity for re-allocation have been fought in court. This is seen most clearly in judical cases dealing with education financing. The famous Serrano v. Priest case of 1971 focused attention on disparities in per pupil expenditure and tax rates between school districts. The state mandated tax structures of California found some parents paying higher taxes to obtain the same or lower expenditures per pupil than parents in other school districts. In the case of Hobson v. Hansen in 1967 allegations of racial and income intra-district discrimination in school allocation were made. The result of such action has led to major reforms in school financing, most notably in California, Minnesota and Florida.

A further example of distributional struggle is busing for racial balance. Although introduced as an attempt to dismantle segregation, inequalities have continued to resurface. Effectively busing may be enforced <u>within</u> school districts, but not <u>between</u> school districts. Thus parents who wish to send their their children to segregated schools can simply relocate to a school district where busing is not imposed or withdraw them from the public school system all together.

The Commodification of the neighbourhood

What of the spatial aspects of such struggles over education? I contend that the form of the role ascribed to 'space' has changed over time. In more concrete terms the way in which people relate to the 'neighbourhood', the 'community', the 'school district' and even the 'home' has been quite different at different points in time.

In my paper I have briefly looked at and characterised the history of mass education. Before the Second World War struggles around education were along class lines Since the Second World War the conflicts over education although distributional in character also appear to have been far more spatial in nature. It is this notion to which I now turn my attention.

My starting point is the neighbourhood. I am going to look at how this 'space' has changed over time. The class struggle conflicts described earlier occured during a period when the localised extended family predominated. Individual family members related to each other in a highly personalised and inter-dependent manner, as in the case of children's income being an essential part of the family economy. The precariousness of at the working class families necessitated some form of an informal social security or mutural support system. This complex web of relations was closely tied to the 'neighbourhood'. One could say that the individuals felt attatched to their neighbourhood.

Indeed it is this concept of attatchment that is central to my argument. That is to say that people today do not feel attatched to their neighbourhood. In fact they regard themselves as detatched from the neighbourhood. The neighbourhood is something out there quite

seperate from the individuals that live in it. As Zane Miller puts it:

> We no longer think of communities as places whose characteristics bear some relation to the character and behaviour of their residents. Contemporary discourse and action about community treat geographic units as spaces not places. ( )

For possible explanations as to why this has occured Miller goes on to suggest that contemporary communities consist of:

> liberated individuals ... free of the older constraints of cultural determinism and its inhabitants are free of any obligation to help transfer any space into a particular kind of place, a place whose inhabitants share (and are thus constrained by) a particular character and pattern of behaviour.

Thus neighbourhood are homogeneous, but not in terms of the family, rather they are expressions of the individual's preference for the bundle of characteristics and goods that comprise their neighbourhood. It follows that if an individual feels their neighbourhood no longer matches their needs they are free to either relocate or transform it through neighbourhood activism. Indeed education is often an important component of neighbourhood activism. This apparent in the reaction to the spatial re-organising of school districts, the construction of new schools and tax increases for the funding of education. These conflicts, and those like them, are essentially distributional in nature. Neighbourhood activism and relocation are expressions of the belief that neighbourhoods are substitutable one for another, in short they appear to be commodities that can be freely exchanged.

Throughout my paper I have used the Second World War as a watershed between class and distributional struggles over education. I shall now justify my choice. Since the Second World War life has become more consumption oriented. Not only with respect to consumer dura-

bles, but also with respect to neighbourhood. At the same time there has been an erosion of class politics accompanied by a marked and related increase in the concerns for upward mobility, equality of opportunity as well as increasing child-centeredness. This new way of life has occured away from the traditional neighbourhood in the newly commodified autonomous neighbourhood shaped by exclusionary zoning and financial institutions.

Thus the spatial aspect of distributional struggles around education has become reified. Indeed this is reflected in academic approaches to the subject. In many studies space is regarded as an independent variable suitable for insertion into a regression analysis. This is reminisant of the work of the economists, Tiebout and Oates dealing with the provision of public goods and services, one of which is, of course, education. In their analyses space is translated as the effect of distance on property values or neighbourhood attributes. Perhaps instead we should remember that space is, in fact, a necessary part of human activity. It is not an abstract thing-in-itself which has the ability to act upon us. Instead we should be thinking in terms of distance as being distance from something and of school districts only as areas enclosing something.

Conclusion

In this paper conflicts centering around education have been examined. The history of mass education was reviewed and it was found that space appears to have become more important since the Second World War. It was suggested that this belief is a manifestation of the commodification of the neighbourhood. In short, the spatial

aspects of conflicts over education has become increasingly reified over time.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Adams, J.S. & Molnar Brown, K. Public school goals and parocial school attendence in twenty American cities. In Adams, J.S. URBAN POLICYMAKING AND METROPOLITIAN DYNAMICS, A COMPARATIVE GEOGRAPHICAL ANAYLSIS. Cambridge: Ballinger publishing company. 1976.

2. Cox. K.R. Conflict, power and politics in the city, a geographical view. New York: McGraw Hill, 1973.

3. Cox, K.R. Location and public problems. Chicago: Maaroufa Press Inc., 1979.

4. Gutman, H.G. WORK, CULTURE AND SOCIETY IN INDUSTRIALIZING AMERICA. New York: Vintage Books, 1976.

5. Hogan, D. Education and the making of the Chicago Working Class, 1880-1930. History of Education Quarterly, Fall 1978, 227-429.

6. Issel, W. Americanization, Acculturation and Social Control: School Reform Ideology in Industrial Pennsylvania, 1880-1910. Journal of Social History 1979, 569-590.

7. Katz, M.B. Class, Bureaucracy and Schooling: The Illusion of Educational Change in America. New York: Vintage Books, 1977.

8. Miller, S. L. History and the Politics of Community Change in Cincinnati. The Public Historian 1983 5:4, 17-35.

9. Parkinson, M.J. The Imperfect Panacea: American faith in education, 1865-1976. New York: Random House, 1977.

10. Willis, P.E. LEARNING TO LABOUR: How working class kids get working class jobs. Farnborough, Hants, England: Saxon House, 1979.

11. Wolf, E.P. & Lebeaux, C.N. Change and urban renewal in an urban community, five case studies of Detriot. London: Fredrick A. Praeger Publishers, 1969.